DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 203 FL 025 305

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TITLE Latino Voices of High School Students: Overcoming the Culture of Silence.
PUB DATE 1998-04-00
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Students; *Cultural Context; Culture Conflict; *High School Students; High Schools; *Hispanic Americans; Interpersonal Communication; Interviews; Public Schools; *Self Expression; Student Attitudes; Student Participation; Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Hispanic American Students; Latinos; *Opression

ABSTRACT

A study with Latino high school students sought to provide a forum for student expression and to examine factors that tend to silence Latino student voices. It explored how students perceive their cultural and linguistic reality, their family history, and the home experiences within the educational system. It also looked at what students see as alternatives for promoting educational reform, legitimizing their voices, and deconstructing practices that encode privilege, power, and marginality in public schools. The researcher developed a series of research questions in these areas, shared them with students, and asked students to prepare interview questions to guide dialogue between researcher and students. The dialogue process was then carried out, and the resulting conversations transcribed and analyzed. Four major themes emerged: (1) a desire to have adults elicit and legitimize student voices in the classroom setting; (2) students felt teachers were afraid they would lose power if students' voices were heard; (3) culture, language, and identity are interwoven throughout life; and (4) education, as a learning process, needs major reforms. Both students' and the researcher's recommendations for change are presented. Contains 87 references. (MSE)

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Latino Voices of High School Students: Overcoming the Culture of Silence

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Paper presented at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association
Symposium "Empowering Latino Families and Students to Overcome Structural Barriers That Inhibit their Academic Achievement"

San Diego, CA, April 16, 1998

FL025305

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Introduction

The subordination, suppression, and silencing of bilingual students' voices and their communities by the educational system has come under scrutiny during the past decade (Darder, 1991; Poplin, 1991b; Walsh, 1991a). This study sought to provide a forum for students' voices by examining some of the factors that promote the silencing of voice in Latino high school students, and submerse them in the culture of silence (Freire, 1985; Shor & Freire, 1987). It explored how students perceive their cultural and linguistic reality, their family history, and their home experiences within the educational system. It also looked at what students foresee as alternatives for promoting educational reform, aiding the emergence and legitimatization of their voices, and attempting to deconstruct practices that tend to encode privilege, power, and marginality in the public school system. Perhaps by listening to students' voices the educational system will become a democratic sphere, thus opening up the encoded structure of silences often imposed on the less-privileged (Weis & Fine, 1993).

Background and Need for the Study

During the past two decades, the deplorable economic, physical, intellectual, and moral conditions that exist within the public schools have caused an outcry for reform (Boyer, 1987; Goodlad, 1984; Kozol, 1991; McLaren, 1989; Poplin and Weeres, 1992; Silberman, 1970; Sizer, 1984). One of the groups most affected by adverse conditions in the educational system is that of bilingual children, a statistically significant and increasingly large percentage of the public schools' population. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, a total of 31.8 million–one out of every seven—persons in the United States speaks a language other than English at home. The majority of these people, whose numbers have increased from 11.1 million in 1980 to 17.3 million in 1990, speak Spanish. By the year 2000 the majority of students in public schools will be children of color with approximately 80% of them being Hispanic (Trueba, 1989).

The education provided to bilingual children in general, and Latino students in particular, "is tied to a complex series of historical, sociocultural, and political relations, concerns, and conditions . . . which include issues

of race, class, colonialism, and power" (Walsh, 1992). Such issues include the interaction between schools and families, the underlying effort toward assimilation of children of color into mainstream American society, and the imposition of a non-inclusive traditional curriculum which enhances the values and traditions of Western Civilization. Latino children experience a higher drop out rate than any other group (Walsh, 1991a) and, by the age of 17, many of them are classified as functionally illiterate (Fueyo, 1988).

The interaction between schools and families who come from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds has been the subject of research for many scholars (Ada, 1988b; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Cazden, Carrasco, Maldonado-Guzman & Erickson, 1985; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Harry, 1992; Jordan & Au, 1981; Ogbu, 1982; Phillips, 1983; Siegel & Laosa, 1983; Soto, 1989, 1992a; Trueba, 1989; Wong Fillmore, 1990). Some educators in the United States still underestimate the contributions of Latino families and attribute the underachievement of Latino students to the inferiority of their culture, organization of their family values, and lack of interest in education (Dunn, 1987). Latino families are given the status of a minority and their contributions to the educational system are not considered valuable (Diaz-Soto, 1993). A similar concern was illustrated by Ada (1990a), who claimed that oftentimes the educational system does not recognize and value the culture, language, and home-based experiences that prevail among children of color.

An underlying effort to have all students assimilate into what is considered the American mold implies that the children of newly arrived immigrants should adapt to the language and customs of mainstream society in North America (Fitzgerald, 1993). As a result, Latino students are asked to negate their origins and adopt a cultural heritage that is not theirs. Assimilation of American values and standards and the abandonment of cultural and ethnic heritage is expected of children of color in order for them to become good U.S. citizens (Darder, 1992). Frantz Fanon described a comparable case referring to the situation of black people from the Antilles: "The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language" (1967, p. 18).

Educational institutions usually follow a traditional curriculum and certification depends on the completion of a certain number of courses. Such studies stress the attitudes and values held by the dominant society and have as common principles the reproduction of a set of canons that are monolithic and non-inclusive. By perpetuating the values and social stratification existent in American society, education becomes a tool that promotes the

reproduction and legitimization of the world view of the dominant majority, thus ignoring the perspectives held by people of color (Darder, 1992; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985). Fanon (1967) contended that the oppressor, by distorting, disfiguring, and destroying the past, contributes to the annihilation of identity in the oppressed. Latino children, believing that their past history and culture do not exist as a part of the school curriculum, embrace a different culture, that of the dominant society, in order to blend in. Octavio Paz (1962) defined this situation as "el ninguneo," which means to pretend mentally that one does not exist in relationship to one's own culture and ethnicity on the outside. As a result, the development of the secret "other," which Paz said "could only be met in the secret of the darkness" (p. 14), or among those who share the same cultural background and ethnicity, takes place. Ada (1990a) explicated that by emulating the behavior of the majority and shedding their language, identity, and names, children of color hope to be accepted as members of the dominant society, a situation which often results in the development of a different personality. All these factors contribute to the success or failure experienced by Latino students as they struggle to reclaim their voices and become agents of effective change in society.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore through students' reflections some of the factors that lead to the silencing of voice in Latino high school students in the United States and what happens when their voices emerge. The purpose was also to discover how students perceive their own cultural and linguistic reality within the classroom, and to explore some alternatives that can promote the emergence and legitimatization of voice in the American educational system. This study aimed to listen to the silent voices of students and learn from them by accepting their words as an untapped and rich source of thoughts and feelings that can serve for teachers and students to create knowledge (Shor, 1992).

Theoretical Framework

Based on Freire's concept (1985) of "conscientizacao" and what he names "the culture of silence," the theoretical framework of this study addressed the voicelessness often experienced by Latino individuals in the high school system. Within the culture of silence, "the masses are mute, that is, they are prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformation of their society and therefore prohibited from being" (p. 50). As a result, individuals are rendered voiceless by a system that is controlled by those in power.

According to Goulet (1992), in the United States, oppression is expressed in multiple forms. Thus, there exists a specific garb which is worn by and characterizes those members of society who are a part of the culture of silence, and which can only be identified by those individuals who have been historically submersed in it. Led to believe that their lives are condemned to a cycle of poverty and violence, millions of Latino students in America experience a similar situation.

Freire's (1985) epistemology, evolving from his work in Third World countries, and contained in his early writings, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973), aims to promote the liberation of the self by asking individuals to name their world, reflecting upon their reality, and acting to transform it. In the United States, Freire's theories have provided the basis for a transformative approach to education as demonstrated by the works of Ada (1992, 1990a, 1990b, 1988a, 1988b), Auerbach & Wallerstein (1987), Apple & King (1977), Aronowitz & Giroux (1991, 1985), Darder (1995, 1992, 1991), Fine (1987), Giroux (1991, 1989, 1988, 1983), McLaren (1989), Poplin (1993,1991a, 1991b, 1991c), Shor (1992) and Walsh (in press, 1994, 1993, 1991a, 1991b) among others.

Methodology and Design of the Study

The methodology was designed to actively engage the students themselves in the research process and, in this process, to promote personal and social change. Such endeavor required a Naturalistic Qualitative research approach that would allow the data to flow from the participants' words while, at the same time, encouraging self-reflection and mutual understanding in a natural setting. Mutual trust, reciprocity, and collaboration were pre-existing conditions. Entering the community was another condition that had already been met. The researcher had been a teacher at the site for three years. Also, she had been the participants' teacher for a period of at least one year. Throughout this time, she had engaged in critical inquiry with her students.

The design of this study is based on the principles of participatory research (de Schutter & Yopo, 1983; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Gaventa, 1988; Hall, 1993, 1992, 1975; Park, 1993; Vio Grossi, 1981). It also draws from what Lather (1991) refers to as emancipatory/praxis-oriented research, and Fine and Vanderslice (1992) call qualitative activist research. These approaches share in common the notion of "catalytic validity," (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p. 240; Brown & Tandon, 1978). According to Lather (1991), catalytic validity "represents the

degree to which the research process re-orients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it" (p. 68). Freire (1970) described such process as "conscientization."

The design was dialectic and reciprocal in nature. This condition lent itself to self-reflection and mutual understanding while providing a forum for expression of students' voices. Empowering procedures, such as dialectical, sequential interviews, which would elicit the emergence of voice, were used as part of this research design. As Comstock (1982) stressed, the use of a dialogical approach is essential in research projects that aim to treat participants as active subjects rather than as objects that reify existing social conditions.

Dialectical sequential interviews constituted the vehicle for communication among the participants and the researcher in this study. The use of dialogue allowed the participants to gather together and actively take part in the process, thus promoting self-inquiry and mutual understanding. By engaging in this process, the participants had an opportunity to explore their realities and express their perspectives. Such an approach was effective in eliciting responses and did not limit the participants to just answering questions or items in questionnaires, but allowed them to speak in a full voice. (Park, 1993).

At the design phase of the study the researcher met informally with the participants in order to validate and refine the proposed research project. The researcher explained to the participants the purpose of the investigation and how it was going to be carried out. She stressed the need for mutual understanding and trust, and asked that the participants be honest and sincere when deciding to commit themselves to this project. All participants were chosen on a voluntary basis after the researcher described the project to the members of her class.

The researcher developed the research questions independently. After sharing the questions with the participants, she asked them to develop the questions to guide the dialogue. This process was carried out in three steps. (1) Each individual developed a set of questions, which were then presented to a small group. (2) The small group selected the questions that were most representative and shared them with the class as a whole. (3) The entire class discussed the questions submitted by each group and voted on the questions that they wanted to incorporate for each topic.

The set of questions to guide the dialogue were printed and distributed to the participants for final approval. Each participant received a set of questions before the dialogue took place. This step was done to provide them with an opportunity to view the items and ask any pertinent questions beforehand. The participants were divided in pairs

on voluntary basis and proceeded to carry out the dialogues. A set of general introductory questions was asked so that the participants could provide a personal description.

Research Setting

The dialogues took place at "Eastern High School" (E.H.S.), in Traviss, Florida [pseudonyms]. Written permission for the study was given by the principal of the school. In addition, each of the participants was asked to sign a written consent, as well as to bring a signed parental permission form. Each dialogue was carried out orally, tape recorded, and then transcribed by the participants. The dialogues lasted for a period of thirty to fifty minutes per session. The time and place was determined by the researcher and the participants in order to facilitate the process. A portable tape recorder was used and each cassette tape was clearly labeled including name of the participant, time, date, place, and dialogue number. All dialogues were recorded unless the participant requested otherwise.

If, throughout the dialogue, other topics of concern arose, the researcher and the participants pursued them, since it was of the utmost importance that the dialogue acted as an empowering tool for the individuals involved. A total of 7 topics were covered by each participant, totaling 140 oral, taped dialogues for the whole group. The taped version was transcribed by the participants at home and brought back to class for discussion of the process involved in gathering the data and the changes experienced by the participants during the data gathering process. This discussion was carried out first in pairs, and then as a group. An evaluation of the process, the personal experiences, and the effects produced by such experiences followed. The reflections written as part of the data gathering process and the personal changes undergone by the participants were given to the researcher. Specific analysis of the data was not done by the participants due to lack of time.

The participants submitted the transcribed dialogues in text form to the researcher. The transcribed dialogues constituted reliable and unchanging information. They reflected events that happened in the past but that could be assessed and re-analyzed without undergoing any change. Furthermore, they represented an invaluable source of information, which was contextually relevant and grounded in the participants' realities. Also, they were written in a language that was natural and pertinent to the setting in which the study occurred (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Analysis

Naturalists approach data analysis in an open-ended, inductive manner rather than in a focused and deductive way. As a result, no hypotheses are posed a priori and the analysis of the data happens as the inquiry takes place (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). After receiving the text, the researcher applied a thematic analysis. The sequential process detailed below incorporated elements from the approaches used by Kieffer (1981), as well as Bogdan and Taylor (1975) and Spradley's emergent theme analysis (1979).

The first step in the analysis of the data encompassed reading all the dialogues to gain a general understanding of students' perspectives on different issues. A second reading involved looking for key words that would illuminate different topics of concern. Key terms were highlighted to color-code them. The dialogues were separated according to key terms. Each dialogue was reassessed to identify the most significant statements. Reflection and interpretation were necessary to uncover the meaning implied in each identified statement and to determine major themes (Wolcott, 1990). Color-coding (Seidman, 1991) the statements according to themes proved helpful to prepare for the next step in the analysis. The major statements of formulated meanings were organized into clusters in terms of themes. The major themes were compared with the original text in order to check for accuracy and comprehension. The revised clusters were then synthesized. The researcher carefully re-read the transcribed data and analyzed the themes in terms of the main research questions. She then organized the themes in the same order as the research questions and summarized the results.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study are listed according to the categories presented in the review of the literature. As previously stated, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are some of the factors that lead to the silencing of voice in Latino high school students within the educational system?

2. What happens when their voices emerge?

3. What do students perceive as their cultural and linguistic reality within the educational system?

4. What are some alternatives that can promote emergence and legitimatization of voice in the educational system?

Selection of the Participants

Eighteen Latino participants, all members of the Spanish-for-Spanish speakers program, advanced placement language class at E.H.S. in Traviss, Florida, were selected on a voluntary basis. There were 12 girls and 6 boys, in grades ten through twelve. They were categorized according to their first and second language development and literacy acquisition experiences. Weber's two categories (1991) were used to identify the students' language literacy: children who became literate in Spanish at a young age and became literate in English at a later stage, and students whose reading skills were developed in English first. Nine of the participants were bilingual students who came from nations in Latin America and the Caribbean and had only been in this country for a couple of years. Nine participants who were born and raised in the United States also participated. Most of them had maintained the Spanish language through parental contact. The participants ranged in age from fifteen to eighteen and differed in terms of their national, linguistic, socio-economic and educational backgrounds. They shared a common desire to complete high school and attend college. Many had known the researcher through Spanish Club activities at the middle school level.

Findings

Accepting the premise that students' voices are an untapped and unexpectedly diverse fountain of thoughts and perspectives, this study aimed to provide a forum where students' voices could be elicited, heard, validated, and legitimized. As a result, students and teacher became co-creators of knowledge in their shared attempt to answer the research questions. The following section presents conclusions related to each research question.

Question: What are some of the factors that lead to the silencing of voice in Latino high school students?

Most participants shared a common belief in the need to express their voices and use them as a political tool to obtain power. However, their attempts were usually thwarted by most teachers and administrators. Among some of the causes that led to the silencing of students' voices was fear, as expressed by Guillermo's comments: "They [administrators and teachers] try to silence our voices, in some cases, for fear, fear of us exposing those who try to oppress our race, for fear that we say what we feel . . . They are afraid."

Teachers and administrators seemed to be afraid of the unknown, that is, what might happen if students were allowed to come to voice and express their inner feelings and thoughts. Yeiza summarized the participants' general feelings by stating: "We are silenced because people are fearful of our ideas and the power we might obtain

with our voices." At times fear appears to be rooted in xenophobia. Students perceived that teachers tended to reject them because they were different from the rest of the school population. As Ryan expressed it: "I think they might be afraid of what they don't understand. What's not familiar to them, they . . . treat it like garbage. . . . Until they try to understand other foreign . . . cultures, I don't think this problem will ever be resolved."

Racism and discrimination, as well as teachers' negative perceptions of Latino students were often mentioned as causes for silencing students' voices. As expressed by Alexia: "they perceive Latinos as students that never do anything, except misbehave, . . . never get their work done and always disrespect teachers and . . . they think that we are all like that and . . . are not worth it." Similarly, authoritarianism and denial of reality played an important role. Alicia stated "They want to avoid getting the truth. You know, finding out what's really going on behind closed doors. They want to keep it under cover."

Question: What happens when their voices emerge?

Observing what happens when students' voices emerge in the classroom setting was a central part of this study. It entailed the creation of a safe haven where students felt a sense of freedom of expression. Creating a safe haven for expression encompassed developing mutual trust, reciprocity, respect, and believing in the ability of students to construct knowledge. It also included the use of a problem-posing approach, where students were considered experts who could contribute to the learning process. Honoring their voices and providing an opportunity to freely express their feelings and thoughts, the researcher promoted the emergence of voice, as Ryan's comments showed:

> In this class, I have a voice. I am allowed to express my ideas and opinions. It's like a whole different world. A world where my voice matters, and my opinions really count, because there is a key, the key to unlock everyone's voice. Even though some people are afraid of this key, my teacher inspires us with her ways of teaching. She encourages us to unlock that voice and share it with the world.

As their voices emerged, students seemed to develop a feeling of security and positive self-esteem. It permeated their actions inside as well as outside of school, providing a sense of well being and more self-confidence. Foremost to their comments was a sense of powerlessness within the classroom setting. Oftentimes they described how teachers ruled their classes, not leaving any space for students' personal expressions. Given the opportunity, the participants engaged in dialogue and explored issues of concern to their daily lives, such as power and knowledge.

Contrary to traditional beliefs, the participants in this study did not see the teacher as the *only* source of knowledge, but considered that they, also, were sources of knowledge. Also, the participants believed that knowledge was actually based on experience and could be acquired throughout life, thus echoing Dewey's words "The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning" (1938, p. 48). This belief might have come from the fact that the students had been engaged in non traditional pedagogical approaches, such as the ones previously described in the review of the literature, for a period of at least one year, before the study took place.

Among the approaches used in the study were the creation of books co-authored with parents or relatives (Ada, 1992); the use of socio-drama to produce videos and short stories (Walsh, 1991a); the development and design of a curriculum based on the generative themes chosen by students (Shor, 1992). Incorporating such approaches into the curriculum contributed to balance the unequal distribution of power existent in the classroom by placing the students as teachers and the teacher as student (Freire, 1970).

Question: What do students perceive as their cultural and linguistic reality within the educational system?

Students' perspectives on their cultural and linguistic reality within the educational system illuminated areas often overlooked. The participants constantly referred to culture and language as integral parts of their identity, considering both major parts intimately connected in their lives. Parents and family seem to play a crucial role in the fostering or suppression of cultural identity. Cultural identity seemed to play a pivotal role, often providing a frame of reference for thoughts and actions. The formation of identity was a crucial part in the development of self-esteem and personal pride. Preserving their culture was a major concern for the participants, who insisted it should be transmitted from generation-to-generation as means of individual and group identification.

According to the participants, the school could also play an important role in the development of cultural identity. Unfortunately, teachers and administrators often seemed to ignore the students' cultural, linguistic, and home based experiences, relegating it to the periphery and contributing to the marginalization of Latino students. Most teachers and administrators did not seem able to address the needs and concerns of Latino students and their families. The participants sensed that such an attitude was often rooted in ignorance, and it was in dire need of change. A "culture clash" (Garcia, 1994) between home and school was forever present, and participants were often caught in the middle.

Question: What are some alternatives that can promote the emergence and legitimatization of voice in the educational system?

The participants considered education essential for advancement in society. A need to revamp the educational system was considered necessary. This move would involve not just curriculum, texts, and physical facilities but, above all, methodological approaches to teaching, with problem posing being a possible alternative. The participants' voices advocated for the removal of educational policies and pedagogical practices that traditionally rule public school classrooms, encoding power and marginalizing Latino students. They clamored for a move, within the school curriculum, that would rupture the structured silences imposed on their history, culture, and language.

Underlying the students' comments was a direct concern with the difference existent between what the school teaches and its lack of incorporation of the realities of their lives. The participants' comments were centered on what their lives are like in the outside world. They often spoke of family, culture, and language as being of great importance to their lives, yet there never seemed to be a connection between what is taught at home and what is taught at school. Again the participants reiterated the need for an inclusive curriculum which would actively incorporate the perspectives of the students, the parents and the community.

The participants considered that education was a learning process that needed to incorporate reflection. Reflection was seen as a process of looking back on the past that encouraged learning from past experiences to take place. As Natalia said, reflection allowed a person to "get a full understanding of what you have learned." Some participants had been taught to reflect by their parents since childhood. The four step method of questioning, reflecting, voicing, and acting was mentioned by a participant as being effective in helping her think about things she had never thought about before and then make appropriate decisions.

The review of the literature seems to indicate that the education afforded to children of color is directly tied to issues of class, gender, race, language, power, and socioeconomic factors. Among the most salient factors are the interaction between schools and families, covert and overt attempts to assimilate Latino students into mainstream American society, the imposition of a non-inclusive traditional curriculum which fails to acknowledge and honor the culture, language, and home-based experiences of people of color. Consequently, Latino children are made to believe that their history and culture do not exist within the school curriculum or in school life.

Regardless of how desperately the students' voices need to be elicited, heard and legitimized, little seems to be happening to have educators and administrators engage in the process of dialogue with students. Such realizations are cause for reflection on the present situation being faced by Latino students, who are often marginalized within the educational system by peers and teachers alike. Issues of power, mainly in the form of domination and oppression, seem to be at the root of the problem.

Many public schools seem to have become assimilation sites. In overt and covert ways, they tend to promote the silencing of voice in Latino high school students. Such places dehumanize children by severing them from their linguistic and cultural ties, thus contributing to dismember the community. Freire (1970) stated: "As the oppressor minority subordinates and dominates . . . it must divide it and keep it divided. . . . The minority cannot permit itself the luxury of tolerating the unification of the people, which would signify a . . . threat to their own hegemony" (p. 137).

Giroux (1982) argued for the need to incorporate the histories of children of color and their communities within the school system. Considering the oppressive conditions faced by children of color in the educational system, there seems to be a need to create a more inclusive, less restrictive environment that can foster mutual respect and understanding among all members of the school community. Such an environment should include the students' language, culture, and home-based experiences as a central part of the curriculum. The incorporation of the lived histories of the communities of people of color seems to be an essential element, which is presently lacking within the system. Pedagogical practices that encourage the construction of meaning and the generation of knowledge are also necessary in order to shift the locus of learning from teacher to student centered. However, among the most important tasks still remaining for educators are "to help students identify the multiple forms of domination that restrict their possibilities and position their understanding . . . [and] to develop pedagogies that encourage students to take action toward transforming that which limits them" (Walsh, 1991a, p. 138).

The findings presented in this study offer an in-depth view of how students' perspectives can illuminate areas of research often unexplored, and how their perspectives can greatly contribute to promote more effective reforms in the field of education. Such findings are in agreement with much of the other recent literature on students' voices (Nieto, 1994; Poplin & Weeres, 1992; Zanger, 1994; Walsh, in press). They also expand previous findings in the area of ethnic identity as it relates to language and culture. It is in this area that they reflect the unique

aspects of the cultural composition of the class studied. As such, these finding are embedded in a particular context, and cannot be fully understood except in context.

Conclusions

The four major themes uncovered provide an insight into how students perceive their cultural and linguistic reality within the school system. They unveil the participants' yearning to have a voice, to be treated with respect and dignity, to have their culture and language brought to the center, and to be considered capable of participating in developing their own curriculum. As the themes unfold, a need to revamp pedagogical approaches is forever present. Deeply ingrained in the participants' words is a firm belief that teachers need to find out who their students are, what needs they face, and how their real lives and experiences can be incorporated as part of the plan of studies.

Foremost to the participants' comments is a desire to have adults elicit and legitimize their voices within the classroom setting. A move in such a direction would contribute to an increase in self-esteem and would strengthen the belief in the democratic aspect of education. Students' perceptions on the reasons why their voices are silenced center mainly on issues of fear. Teachers and administrators seem to be afraid of what may happen if students are allowed to voice their concerns. Stereotypes dealing with Latino students attitudes toward school, as well as xenophobia and denial of reality also play an important role in silencing and suppressing students' voices in the educational setting.

Students perceived that many teachers were afraid they might lose power if students were allowed to actively come to voice in the classroom. Most participants believed that power meant control. Teachers and administrators were often seen as the only individuals who had any active power in the school. As a result, students complained about being "under" the teacher's power at most times. Acquiring knowledge was conceived as an ongoing process, which was not confined to the school setting. It was clearly stressed that power and knowledge were intimately connected, and the more knowledge individuals had, the more power they could obtain.

Perhaps the area that participants considered one of the most important was ethnic identity. Culture, language and identity were braided as integral parts. Participants stressed how each one of them was woven throughout life, contributing to the development of self-esteem. The role of the family in the development or suppression of ethnic identity was of utmost importance, since children see parents and relatives as the source or transmitters of culture and language. Likewise, the school was seen as an important contributor that could play a

major role by incorporating the home based linguistic and cultural experiences of the students, but often chose not to do so.

The participants in this study considered education as a learning process in need of major reforms. Foremost, the students advocated for the development of new methodologies that would be centered on their realities. Oftentimes there was a distinct separation between what the school teaches and what students' lives are about, with no connection provided as a bridge. Students were concerned with the over use of memorization as an approach to teaching, and the lack of time to reflect on the material that was being taught. Reflection was considered an extremely important activity that should be incorporated as a part of every lesson. Problem posing was portrayed as a viable alternative to aid in the emergence of voice, since it provided opportunities for students to actively engage in dialogue and reflection.

The themes uncovered through the dialogical process are extremely significant in light of what students stated. They illuminate areas that need to be considered when planning an effective approach to education. Also, they reveal ways in which pedagogy and education need to change in order to provide equal opportunities for all students. These comments and perspectives support concerns and issues previously discussed in the review of the literature. As such, they reinforce the belief that students are experts who need to be included as an integral part of the educational movement if effective change is to take place.

The four major themes are deeply interconnected in a myriad of ways. The students' comments reveal that coming to voice leads to the acquisition of power, thereby disrupting traditional educational approaches that portray the teacher as the sole holder of power in the classroom. A similar situation happens with knowledge, which is regarded by the participants as the key to power. Therefore, if students' voices are acknowledged in the classroom, the unequal distribution of power existent is shifted. At the same time, the locus of learning and creation of knowledge becomes a dialogical process where teacher and students alike can be co-creators.

Culture and language are central to the development of ethnic identity, which is an expression of the inner-self called voice. The teacher, as a holder of power and knowledge, often chooses what is presented to the students in the classroom. Students' perspectives clamored for the incorporation of their own culture, language and home-based experiences as part of the curriculum which, according to them, should be centered on their personal realities. Again, a rupture from traditional approaches was deemed necessary in order to shift the learning locus from teacher

to student centered. Education was described as a learning process that needed to incorporate reflection as an essential element. Using a problem posing approach was considered important as a means to actively incorporate students in the decision making process, allowing them to introduce their concerns, and seek viable solutions to their problems.

The students' voices greatly contribute to answering the initial research questions posed in this study. They shed light on issues that are seldom considered important by proposers of educational reform. Above all, the students' comments force teachers and administrators to question what is the reality lived by students in the classroom and how pedagogical approaches need to change if the challenge of democracy is to be addressed. The participants' perspectives shatter many preconceived pedagogical notions, which are still reinforced in teacher preparation programs and call for drastic reforms in the field of education.

Recommendations

The recommendations for action come from the participants and the researcher. The participants' words advocate for action within the classroom. The researcher's recommendations are divided in two sections. The first section refers to action that can be taken by teachers in their classrooms. The second section addresses issues that can be implemented in teacher-training programs. Finally, there are recommendations for further research.

Participants' Recommendations for Action

At the end of the study the participants were asked what general recommendations for action they would give teachers in order to improve the conditions existing in school today. Resonant among the participants' concerns is desire for change in methodological approaches and pedagogical practices. The following excerpts summarize their comments and suggestions, and provide general guidelines for specific action within the classroom:

> My advice to teachers is to give students time to think and reflect about topics that connect the curriculum with their daily lives. Education should not be based on lectures and memorization, it should be based on topics that are typical of the lives of teenagers today (such as racism and discrimination). (Natalia)

Pablo's words summarized the general feelings expressed by the participants in this study in reference to the establishment of a closer relationship between teachers and students, similar to what Mercado (1993) described as "caring as empowerment":

> My recommendations to present and future teachers are that they become more involved in the personal lives of their students. I also recommend that they prepare activities that reflect what happens in the lives of their students. Many teachers never pay a lot of attention or make efforts in helping students cope with their personal lives. Such effort on the teacher's part leads to establish a strong relationship between teacher and student, a relationship so strong that it never dies. (Pablo)

Alexia also addressed the need for teachers to get to know their students, as well as allow them to contribute to the curriculum, by incorporating their cultures and lived realities.

> I would recommend to other teachers that they make an effort to get to know their students and to let them speak about their cultures and those things that are important to their lives. When a teacher tries to get to know her students and to help them, the students grow emotionally and spiritually and the class, as a group, becomes more united. (Alexia)

The participants seem to call for teachers to believe in the participatory nature of learning, in which students collectively engage in investigating, interrogating and producing knowledge. The usage of themes that are grounded in their lives, as part of the curriculum seems to be another important issue addressed by the students. Foremost, there seems to be a desire, on the part of the students, to have teachers engage with them as individuals, to affirm them as human beings, and to allow for the establishment of personal relationships grounded in spiritual, emotional, and intellectual levels.

Researcher's Recommendations for Action

The following recommendations are based on the researcher's interpretations of her findings, as well as her experience as an educator, and her understanding of pedagogical practices that may elicit the emergence of students' voices.

1. Pedagogical practices should be re-examined in order to provide congruence with various styles of learning and multiple intelligences. Reflection should be incorporated as an essential component.

2. A more encompassing curricula not centered on Eurocentric perspectives that acknowledges the histories, languages, cultures, and home-based experiences of people of color should be developed and implemented in order to provide a more accurate perspective of the world, and the contributions of people of color to society.

3. Teachers and administrators should engage in dialogue with students of color in order to discover what their realities are and incorporate them within the plan of studies.

4. Teachers and administrators should participate in cultural awareness sessions that could present the students' perspectives in order to address the needs and concerns of children of color.

5. Teacher-training programs (e.g., pre-service, teacher preparation students, public school in-service) should require a multicultural awareness course which could emphasize a change of attitude toward the histories, cultures, languages, and home-based experiences of people of color.

6. Teacher-training programs should incorporate essential methodological approaches that promote dialogue and reflection among participants in order to foster the emergence of voice in students. Prospective teachers who have experienced such approaches can then incorporate them in their classrooms and explore their possibilities.

Personal Reflections

Conducting this study afforded the researcher an opportunity to gain more knowledge and insight into the world of Latino high school students and their communities. The participants' voices opened a window to a particular world, often unexplored by educators, and far more complex than one can imagine. The themes identified and discussed previously present only a part of the findings. Emerging as a result of the researcher delving deeper in the analysis and reflection of the process, are other more profound and fundamental issues, such as the need to talk of love, trust, and hope at the core of the learning process. The need to recognize the nature of humanness as an ability to know and transform in order to create a more equal and just society is also evident, as is the need to incorporate the use of dialogue and reflection as pedagogical practices.

Frightening for the researcher is the realization that students and educators seem to exist in two separate school worlds which are totally apart and seldom come in contact with one another. The school world as perceived by students does not coincide with the school world educators see. As a result, educators address issues that they consider important, without realizing where students' perspectives are centered and what their needs are. Perhaps the inclusion of dialogue between both groups would bring a better understanding of such situation.

Feelings of love, the inclusion of caring as empowerment, and the belief that all human beings are capable of creating knowledge are important aspects that also need to be incorporated in the learning process. Such process also demands true, long-term commitment and, more important, is to realize that, "In such work, the distinctions between the personal, the professional, and the political are blurred. The relationships that emerge cannot be entered into lightly nor can one expect that when a project ends they can withdraw" (Walsh, 1992).

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